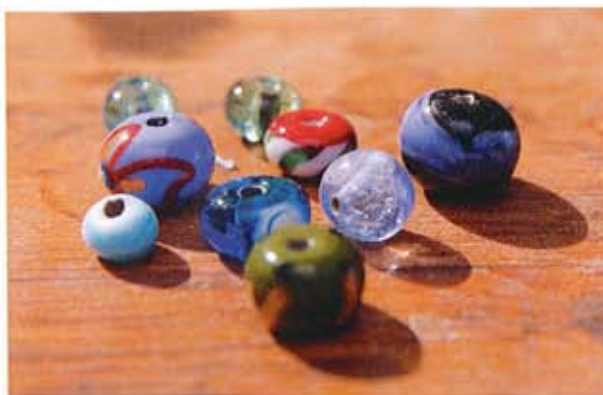




The Art of Fire:

Glass Beads, Blown Glass, Ceramics and Kiln-firing Workshops with Ciro and Marian Abath of Terrafuse

Marian is sitting in front of a small torch the size of a gear shift in her home studio. A 1,200°F (650°C) flame shoots from the torch tip as Marian melts the ends of royal blue, white and turquoise Murano glass sticks onto a thin stainless-steel rod dipped in clay.

— By Amie Watson

The glass wants to contract and become round," she says, shaping it around the rod, called a mandrel, which she's holding horizontally and rotating slowly as the glass melts. When Marian has finished swirling the colors into a kaleidoscope of glass, she submerges the bead into a bucket of vermiculite to cool. "If it cools too fast, the glass breaks," she explains.

Marian teaches this technique to beginners every Monday and Thursday morning at her home and workshop, which she shares with her husband Ciro. His sculptures, blown glass and other works can be found throughout Aruba, from museums to public squares. While he works on a collection of bronze-cast *divi* trees tinged blue with copper nitrate for a local company, and our bead cools, Marian and I sit among the almond trees in the backyard of her *cunucu* house, a traditional Aruban

structure that takes advantage of the trade winds to naturally cool the dwelling – helpful when working with 1,200°F flames.

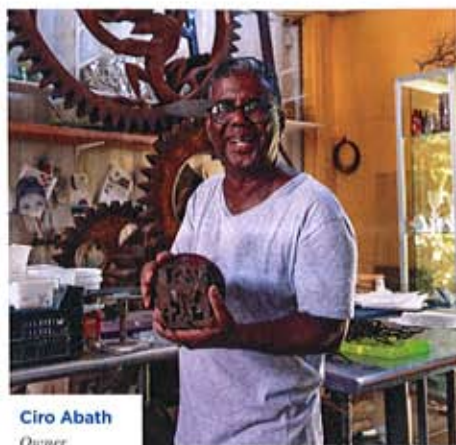
As roosters weave through the garden, Marian tells me about *Terrafuse's* workshops and her love for fire and glass.

How did you get into blowing glass and bead-making?

I came to Aruba in 1999 from the Netherlands for a job in the Department of Education, guiding teachers in their pedagogical approach. At the time, Ciro was an art teacher at a high school. I'm from an artistic family, but when I started studying educational science, I forgot about it. After we married and had a baby, Ciro signed up for a course in Istanbul. I joined him for a couple of weeks and ended up taking a bead-making course. From day one at a torch, my life changed.

Do you and Ciro ever collaborate on pieces?

Yes. For example, the blown glass drops at the airport are ours. There are 200 of them. They're glass leaves representing water and wind, two important elements for Aruba.



Ciro Abath
Owner



Marian Abath
Owner



Do you have to learn glass bead-making before you blow glass?

It's easier to start with beads. We offer glass blowing workshops twice a year, but bead-making we offer twice a week.

How many people can you accommodate in a workshop?

We have six torches, so a maximum of six.

What are some of your favorite stories from workshops?

It's funny, each person makes five or six beads for a bracelet or keychain and sometimes we get couples who fight and say, "That's my bead!" These people have been married for years and they're fighting over a bead! But this morning, this couple said, "You pick the bead you like most from the ones I made and I'll pick the one I like most from yours." And they added that bead to their own piece. That was so sweet.

Where can people buy your glass jewelry, ornaments and other creations?

We have a small shop here and I also sell at *Cosecha*. *Wix Tours*, a local company, brings groups to tour the ceramics studio, kiln casting studio with all the sculptures and the glass blowing and bead-making studio. They often buy pieces from the shop. We also sell student work, to help get them going. Now some of them sell at *Cosecha*, too, and one sells at afternoon

markets at the *Tamarijn* on Wednesdays, the *Marriott* on Tuesdays and *Divi Phoenix* on Thursdays.

How do you give back to the community?

We do programs with local youth. Once we did a class for kids with learning disabilities. They'd been told so many times that they cannot learn. They can! When they're at a torch, the flame forces respect. They're so proud of what they've made in a few hours, even boys who are 15, 16 years old.

Is all blown glass hand-made?

There was a long discussion about IKEA because they sell glass work labelled 'hand-made'. And it is, but it's a production process. If a machine blows the puff of air but a human rotates the glass in the heat, is it machine-made?

What courses do you offer?

We have the three-hour course glass bead-making course. If people like it, they can continue for another three-hour course. The glass blowing is two three-hour courses. For ceramics, you need to be on Aruba for a week; the clay has to dry before you fire it, glaze it and pick it up. For kiln casting, we make kiln-fired sea shells. We did one class, two years ago, that was twice a week for two weeks. People even came to Aruba for the course. We also do them upon request from a Friday night to Sunday.

Can anyone learn to work with fire and glass?

As long as you're capable of using both hands, yes! The last years I was working in the Department of Education, I was trying to set up programs for adult learning on Aruba. I see a lot of adult education here at our workshops. Some people just need to see a demo and they catch it. Some need to hear a story. So if I have six people who've never been at a torch, I'm running around, because everyone learns differently. But it's so rewarding to make something. You have to leave your comfort zone. And with glass bead-making, in three hours you go home with something you love. Maybe it's more about making people proud of what they've done than the actual beads.

Any regrets about leaving your job three years ago to give workshops and create art to sell full time?

No. I'd been giving the workshops part time since 2008. People ask if I get bored always doing beginner workshops, but you're opening a world for someone. How can that be boring? ■

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